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The Vicereines of Ireland and the Transformation of the Dublin Court, c. 1703-1737*

BY RACHEL WILSON

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, court life at Dublin Castle was poorly developed, while the wives of the lords lieutenant of Ireland, the vicereines, had only a limited role within Irish society. Less than forty years later, they ranked among the country's leading hostesses and their establishments had become social and political hubs. By analysing the activities of these women in conjunction with modifications to Dublin Castle, this article discusses how and why these changes came about. It demonstrates how inextricably linked were the evolutions of the court and the vicereines, the increasing importance of each to the success of a lord lieutenancy and the parallels between the royal and viceregal regimes.

‘The Duke of Dorset has just taken his leave to go and King it in Ireland. I am sure he will be happier in that Drury Lane employment than any man upon earth’.¹ So said Lord Hervey in 1731. Quite aside from his dismissive, though remarkably accurate, prediction of how Dorset would behave in Dublin, Hervey’s comment highlights one line of contemporary English thought on the Irish system of government: that the British monarch’s representative there was merely an actor, playing an ostentatious yet ultimately insignificant role, and providing a poor imitation of a much greater production going on elsewhere, namely London. No mention was made of how Dorset’s wife might function as a ‘queen’ to her husband’s ‘king’ and Hervey showed no appreciation of the social and political potential of the Dublin court, or of the metamorphosis it had undergone in the preceding decades.

* I would like to thank Professor David Hayton, Clarissa Campbell Orr and the anonymous reviewers for reading earlier drafts of this article and for their very helpful comments.

¹ Baron Hervey to Stephen Fox, 14 Aug. 1731, in Earl of Ilchester (ed.), *Lord Hervey and his Friends 1726–38* (London, 1950), p. 76.

Between the Restoration and the Glorious Revolution, Ireland was generally governed on behalf of the English Crown by a series of lords lieutenant (or occasionally, lords deputy), informally known as viceroys.² These men were predominantly English and spent much of their tenure managing the country's affairs from their official residence in Dublin Castle, which doubled as the administrative centre of the Irish government. Nevertheless, despite their frequent presence, the viceregal court remained poorly developed. It had minimal social or political significance and paled in comparison to what could be found in England. The condition of Dublin Castle, both inside and out, was partly to blame, for it was small, poorly furnished and in a constant state of disrepair, having suffered from several fires and a lack of investment.³ It did little to enhance the prestige of its inhabitants and was not an appropriate location for large, formal entertainments, which were almost entirely restricted to state anniversaries and royal birthdays. The viceroys' wives, the vicereines, were virtually inactive in Irish society and its elite was forced to look elsewhere for amusements. Fortunately, although its court was mediocre, the capital offered its inhabitants an otherwise diverse social programme. Private plays had been performed for centuries, the city's first theatre had opened in the 1630s and there was a discernible social season from November to March, with a further round of activities in April and May.⁴ In the period after the Williamite revolution, this season mirrored, but was not tied to, the meetings of the Irish Parliament, whose sessions

² For a discussion of the differences between the two titles and the reasons one was preferred over the other, see Peter Gray and Olwen Purdue, 'Introduction: The Irish Lord Lieutenant c. 1541-1922', in Gray and Purdue (eds), *The Irish Lord Lieutenant c. 1541-1922* (Dublin, 2012), pp. 7-8.

³ Earl of Arran to the Duke of Ormond, 7 Apr. 1684, quoted in J. B. Maguire, 'Dublin Castle: Three Centuries of Development', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 115 (1985), p. 15; Earl of Clarendon to the Earl of Rochester, 12 Aug. 1686, in F. E. R., *Historical Reminiscences of Dublin Castle from 849 to 1904* (Dublin, 1904), p. 43.

⁴ Christopher Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601-2000* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 3-4; Tighernan Mooney and Fiona White, 'The Gentry's Winter Season', in David Dickson (ed.), *The Gorgeous Mask: Dublin, 1700-1850* (Dublin, 1987), pp. 1-2.

became more regular and finally biennial, as its importance as a source of revenue for the Crown grew.⁵

William III preferred to manage Ireland using a team of lord justices rather than a lord lieutenant or deputy, but after his death, the use of a viceroy again became standard. As in the previous century, these men were almost exclusively English (the 2nd Duke of Ormond being the exception) and tended to descend on Ireland only for parliamentary sessions, with the result that the country's governor was often unfamiliar with its political landscape. Though some worked hard to overcome this disadvantage and manage the Irish Parliament in person, by the late 1710s, it had become customary for a viceroy to engage the services of a single 'undertaker'. This was an Irish politician, powerful enough to act as the lord lieutenant's parliamentary manager and willing to 'undertake' the task of obtaining the necessary support from MP's for the viceregal agenda. In exchange, they gained 'a voice in policy-making and a substantial share of the official patronage for themselves and their dependants'.⁶

In these changing political circumstances, the court took on a new importance, for it represented an opportunity for the viceroy to familiarise and ingratiate himself with the Irish elite (and vice versa) and generate loyalty to himself and the English regime. To date however, little work has been done to establish whether or not this potential was harnessed by the lords lieutenant and their wives and to what extent a vicereine could influence the Dublin establishment and use her position to support her husband's political interests.

None of the vicereines who will be discussed here have received any independent scholarly attention and they make only the briefest of appearances in the current historiography on the lord lieutenancy. The first modern historian to examine the office across the whole period of its existence since 1700 was Joseph Robins, though he limited

⁵ C. I. McGrath, *The Making of the Eighteenth-Century Irish Constitution: Government, Parliament and the Revenue, 1692–1714* (Dublin, 2000), pp. 35, 154.

⁶ D. W. Hayton, 'The Beginnings of the "Undertaker System"', in Thomas Bartlett and Hayton (eds), *Penal Era and Golden Age: Essays in Irish History 1690-1800* (Belfast, 1979), p. 32.

himself to a study of ‘the social and ceremonial life of the viceregal court’.⁷ Although Robins provided more detail than was previously available, his book was written for a non-academic audience and, with over two hundred years of history to encapsulate, it dealt with the various viceroys at considerable speed. Toby Barnard has produced more detailed work on the late Stuart and early Hanoverian courts and recently, a volume of essays edited by Peter Gray and Olwen Purdue has appeared, which focuses on the office from 1541 until its end.⁸ By considering ‘the multiple dimensions of the lord lieutenantancy as an institution — in its political, social and cultural aspects’, it provides the well-rounded view of the topic previously lacking.⁹ For those who were viceroy in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, there are also several articles examining their time in Dublin, as well as biographies and entries in both the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and the *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.¹⁰

Although the material presented here has implications for our understanding of women’s role in Irish politics and society and the practicalities involved in governing via the viceroy system, the article will focus on the growth and interaction of the court and the vicereines and will revolve around three core arguments. First, that the Dublin court was gradually transformed between 1703 and 1737, from a dull, virtually expendable entity, to a quasi-regal institution and a central component of the lord lieutenantancy. Increasingly patterned after its London counterpart, it became a focal point for Irish society during its sporadic appearances and a platform on which the viceroys and undertakers could advertise and

⁷ Joseph Robins, *Champagne and Silver Buckles: The Viceregal Court at Dublin Castle 1700–1922* (Dublin, 2001), vii.

⁸ Toby Barnard, ‘The Vice-Regal Court in Later Seventeenth-Century Ireland’, in Eveline Cruickshanks (ed.), *The Stuart Courts* (Stroud, 2000), pp. 256–65; and his *Making the Grand Figure: Lives and Possessions in Ireland, 1641–1770* (Yale, 2004), pp. 1–20.

⁹ Gray and Purdue, ‘Introduction: The Irish Lord Lieutenantancy’, p. 1.

¹⁰ See for example, Toby Barnard and Jane Fenlon (eds), *The Dukes of Ormonde, 1610–1745* (Woodbridge, 2001); L. A. Dralle, ‘Kingdom in Reversion: The Irish Viceroyalty of the Earl of Wharton 1708–10’, in *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 15 (1951–2), pp. 393–431; Dorothy Somerville, *The King of Hearts: Charles Talbot, Duke of Shrewsbury* (London, 1962); Archibald Ballantyne, *Lord Carteret, a Political Biography, 1690–1763* (London, 1887); Patrick McNally, ‘Wood’s Halfpence, Carteret, and the Government of Ireland, 1723–6’, *Irish Historical Studies*, 30 (1997), pp. 354–76.

exercise their power. Second, this more formal type of court was most successful when it included an active and able vicereine, and during the opening decades of the eighteenth century, the vicereines' role also experienced a significant and sustained change, as viceroys' wives became increasingly prominent in Dublin as society hostesses and cultural patronesses. Finally, these dual transformations were not coincidental: the court and the vicereines existed in a kind of symbiosis. Each contributed to the development of the other and each was influenced by the current political situation and the incumbent viceroy's reaction to it. Other factors will also be considered, for the way in which change unfolded also owed much to the personalities involved and even to the condition of the viceregal residence.

For a time after 1691, Dublin Castle remained in a poor state. Although plans had been made for its improvement as early as 1684, it was not until the 1710s that they were realised. The previous condition of the Castle must have been a serious handicap to the social aspirations of viceregal couples. Between 1710 and 1721, however, the Castle's entrance was modified and new kitchens, stables, offices, a treasury and a council chamber were constructed, to replace buildings which either had been destroyed or were no longer fit for purpose. Work continued throughout the 1720s and 1730s, but the south-west range, also started during the 1710s, was not finished until the 1740s, nor was the new entrance complete until 1741.¹¹ Further problems were caused by the interior of the Castle and its lack of furnishings. The first Duke and Duchess of Ormond, who were viceroy and vicereine in 1643–47, 1648–50, 1662–69 and 1677–84, had transported some of their belongings from their seat at Kilkenny Castle to Dublin, but not all holders of the office had this option.¹² In order to compensate, some purchased their predecessors' unwanted goods, bought new items

¹¹ Edward McParland, *Public Architecture in Ireland, 1680–1760* (Yale, 2001), pp. 94–8; Frederick O'Dwyer, 'Dublin Castle and its State Apartments 1660–1922', *The Court Historian*, 2 (1997), p. 2; Robin Usher, *Protestant Dublin, 1660–1760: Architecture and Iconography* (Basingstoke, 2012), pp. 143–4.

¹² 'Lord Lieutenants of Ireland (1640–1922)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [ODNB]; Barnard, 'The Vice-Regal Court', pp. 257–9; National Library of Ireland [hereafter NLI], MS 2554, 'An Inventory of all the Goods in Dublin Castle Belonging to his Grace the Duke of Ormonde [sic] Lord Lieutenant of Ireland the 21st of March 1678'.

in Dublin, or imported their own belongings from England, but the combination of hand-me-downs and penny-pinching inevitably led to fluctuations in the degree of grandeur presented by the court.¹³ Overall, things were improving, though, and the ongoing physical changes to the Castle not only made it a more comfortable home, but also helped the lord lieutenant to project an air of wealth and power in keeping with his position. By the 1720s, it had become a viable space in which to entertain, and, if Jonathan Swift is to be believed, it possessed ‘regal rooms’ containing the ‘spoils of Persian looms’.¹⁴

In the following decade, larger gatherings were accommodated by using the entire Castle and adjoining buildings and at the birthday celebrations in November 1731, the English-born Mary Pendarves (later Delany) wrote that ‘the whole apartment of the Castle was open, which consists of several very good rooms’.¹⁵ The council chamber constructed in the 1710s could double as a supper-room and the grandest balls were held in ‘the old beef-eaters’ hall, a room that holds seven hundred people seated’ and which was filled to capacity on occasion.¹⁶ The rooms themselves were aesthetically pleasing and no complaints remained about a lack of furniture. The three function rooms in the viceregal apartments were ‘not altogether so large as those at St James’s, but of a very tolerable size’¹⁷ and when required, they were beautifully decorated, something the vicereines may have had a hand in.¹⁸

¹³ For example, the 1st Duke and Duchess of Ormond sold some of their unwanted furniture and provisions to the incoming Lord and Lady Robartes in 1669, the Earl of Rochester was prepared to buy as much linen as he could in Ireland in 1701 (though this was partly to encourage the native textile industry) and the Boltons sent furniture from England ahead of their own arrival in 1717. *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Manuscripts of the Marquess of Ormond, K.P. Preserved at Kilkenny Castle*, new series (8 vols, London, 1902–20), vol. III, 443, Elizabeth, Duchess of Ormond to George Mathew, 6 Mar. 1668/9; NLI, MS 45, 721/1, Rochester to Thomas Keightley, 1 July 1701; *Weekly Packet*, 3–10 Aug. 1717.

¹⁴ ‘An apology to the Lady Carteret’, in Pat Rogers (ed.), *Jonathan Swift: The Complete Poems* (London, 1983), p. 296.

¹⁵ Mary Pendarves to Anne Dewes, 4 Nov. 1731, in Lady Llanover (ed.), *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany: With Interesting Reminiscences of King George III and Queen Charlotte* (3 vols, London, 1861), vol. I, p. 309.

¹⁶ Same to same, 26 Sept. 1731 (*ibid.*, pp. 337–8).

¹⁷ Same to same, 26 Sept. 1731 (*ibid.*, p. 290).

¹⁸ For example, see same to same, 4 Nov. 1731 (*ibid.*, p. 309); Irish Architectural Archive [hereafter IAA], MS A/9, Lady Anne Conolly to the Earl of Strafford, 31 Oct. 1733.

The expansion and adaption of the viceregal residence to suit the social and political demands placed on it meant that increasingly, the vicereines could not use its poor state to justify leading a quiet and secluded life in Dublin. Nevertheless, like the changes to the Castle, the modifications to their position were incremental and subject to setbacks.

I

The first vicereine of the eighteenth century was Mary, Duchess of Ormond (figure 1). She visited Ireland from 1703–05 and under her guidance, the Dublin court and the position of the lord lieutenant's wife within it experienced limited progress.¹⁹ Daughter of the first Duke of Beaufort and married into Ireland's leading family, the Butlers, she had previously visited the country in 1697 and was its only duchess at this time.²⁰ As a lady of the bedchamber to Queen Anne, she was already familiar with court life and was a successful hostess whose house in England was 'continually filled with the best company in the kingdom'.²¹ Though Dublin Castle had yet to benefit from the major reconstruction it would undergo over the next forty years, the Ormonds, like the Duke's grandparents, imported furniture and accoutrements from Kilkenny Castle to enhance their establishment. Their apartments were richly furnished with copious amounts of damask and boasted luxury items including mirrors and pendulum clocks, all of which would suggest that they were not reliant upon the state to fund their way of life.²² The Duke was held in high esteem by many in Ireland where his landholdings, family ties and military fame (he was involved in numerous campaigns during the 1690s and early 1700s and had been taken prisoner by the French in 1693) ensured he maintained a

¹⁹ R. O. Bucholz, *The Augustan Court: Queen Anne and the Decline of Court Culture* (Stanford, 1993), p. 118.

²⁰ 'Butler, James, 2nd Duke of Ormond (1665–1745)', *ODNB*.

²¹ Anon., *A Short Memorial, and Character, of that Most Noble and Illustrious Princess Mary Dutchess of Ormonde* (London?, 1735?), p. 25.

²² NLI, MS 2524, Inventories, 1705, cited in McParland, *Public Architecture*, p. 94.

personal and political following which was independent of his status as viceroy.²³ These factors, along with his ducal status, made him a willing and ideal candidate for the role. He and his wife had received rapturous welcomes from local politicians and the public alike in Dublin, Waterford and Kilkenny during their 1697 visit, and such was the Duke's popularity that his birthday was celebrated at a party in the capital in 1707 (when he was out of office) by sixty-one people, including many politicians.²⁴

With such an advantageous background and connections, Mary appears to have been ideally suited to the position of vicereine, but there were difficulties in turning this promise into success. Initial reports regarding the court were certainly favourable, describing it as being 'in greater splendour than was ever known in that Kingdom'²⁵ (a qualified compliment, given what had gone before) and under the care of a popular viceroy who intended to have 'some of the Commons at dinner in public every day', effectively combining courtly entertainments with politics.²⁶ However, even if this idea became reality, it did not necessarily improve Mary's position, for her attendance at such dinners is uncertain and even if she were present, she may have been the only lady at the table, for no mention is made of the invitations being extended to MPs' wives. A similar problem had arisen in 1697, when, whilst staying at Kilkenny Castle, she complained that aside from one female attendant, she had 'no company but men that think themselves very dully entertained by a woman they never saw before and are upon the high respect with'.²⁷ Whether or not this issue arose in 1703, any jointly hosted dinners would have been severely interrupted by the Duke's

²³ 'Butler, James, 2nd duke of Ormond', *ODNB*; D. W. Hayton, 'Dependage, Clientage and Affinity: The Political Following of the Second Duke of Ormonde', in Barnard and Fenlon (eds), *Dukes of Ormonde*, pp. 211-12.

²⁴ British Library, Add. Mss 28881, fol. 331, Val[entine] Smyth to John Ellis, 23 June 1697; Public Record Office of Northern Ireland [hereafter PRONI], T2812/4/218; Edward Wingfield to Kean O'Hara, 9 Nov. 1697; Surrey History Centre [hereafter SHC], MS 1248/2/264-265; Alan Brodrick to Thomas Brodrick, 30 Apr. 1707.

²⁵ John Macky, *Memoirs of the Secret Services of John Macky, esq: During the Reigns of King William, Queen Anne and King George I* (London, 1733), p. 10.

²⁶ PRONI, T2812/9/31, Toby Caulfield to King [*recte* Kean] O'Hara, 26 Sept. 1703.

²⁷ NLI, MS 2505, Mary, Duchess of Ormond to Benjamin Portlock, 12 Feb. [1697/8]. This letter bears the year 1703, however its content clearly places it in 1697/8.

absences from Dublin, for he was frequently in England or on viceregal progresses within Ireland.²⁸

As in earlier times, grand celebrations were held to mark special and state occasions and on these days, Mary played her part. In August 1703, she joined her husband after his inspection of several companies of soldiers in the city and was ‘attended by the Lady Mayoress, and several ladies of quality, and the Aldermens’ wives’,²⁹ before co-hosting a dinner, then a ball (complete with a ‘very handsome banquet of sweet meats’) with the Duke that evening.³⁰ Six months later the couple publicly celebrated the birthday of Queen Anne in Dublin, for which the Duchess invited all the ladies to a play in the evening and from thence his Grace carried them to St Stephen’s Green, to see the fireworks made on this occasion; which being ended the company returned to the Castle, and after a very noble supper, where none but the Duke and Duchess and the ladies sat, the remainder of the night was concluded with a ball.³¹

There is little evidence that Mary interacted with Dublin society away from such official events though, something which may be explained by her background. Though it seemed to prepare her well for a position at the pinnacle of Irish society, this appearance was deceptive. She outranked the Irish ladies around her and was unaccustomed to dealing with those of a lower station, such as ‘Aldermens’ wives’. The fact that in previous years the (mostly male) courtiers who were available to her at Kilkenny Castle were constantly ‘upon the high respect’ with her eight months after her arrival, suggests that even before she was vicereine, she was an intimidating figure to many men and, despite her frustrations, was unable or

²⁸ *H.M.C., Ormonde MSS*, n.s., viii, pp. xxxviii-xliv.

²⁹ Abel Boyer, *The History of the Reign of Queen Anne, Digested into Annals. Year the first* (11 vols, London, 1703–13), vol. I, p. 79.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

unwilling to put them at their ease, much less befriend their wives, sisters and daughters.³²

Five years later, her experience of the English court had provided little in the way of inspiration as to how to fix this problem, for its daily routine had become stale and monotonous and Queen Anne was a poor example of a hostess. Although royal birthdays and anniversaries were celebrated, Anne's fixation with etiquette left her unapproachable to her courtiers and her increasingly poor health and retiring personality presented serious obstacles to lively entertainments.³³ Drawing rooms became more and more infrequent as her reign progressed and when they were held, they provided little in the way of conversation or entertainment, beyond some gambling.³⁴ Though Mary functioned as a consort, rather than a ruler and so might have been expected to share the responsibility for running the Dublin establishment, in reality, her husband's absences often left her as the focus of the viceregal court. If Anne's example is what she sought to emulate, it is unlikely she did better than her royal mistress and unsurprising that evidence of her efforts is so limited.

The Duke's frequent trips were indicative of another obstacle facing the Duchess in her interactions with Irish society: the deteriorating state of her marriage. Ultimately her husband would abandon her entirely in 1715, going into exile in France, but as early as 1698 Mary was complaining that he wrote to her so rarely, that even 'two words once in four posts' would be a welcome improvement.³⁵ His decision to leave her alone in Ireland for long periods of time, and his failure to take her with him on his viceregal tours of the country, publicised his indifference and deprived her of the opportunity to present herself as his

³² Toby Barnard has reached a similar conclusion for Mary's failure to socialise more readily and extensively with the Irish ladies (Barnard, 'Introduction: The Dukes of Ormonde', in Barnard and Fenlon (eds), *Dukes of Ormonde*, p. 33).

³³ Bucholz, *The Augustan Court*, pp. 30-5, 153-4. For a list of the celebrations held at court in London for royal birthdays and anniversaries during Anne's reign, see *ibid.*, pp. 216, 231-4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-3, 246-7. Although Anne Somerset has recently presented a slightly more sympathetic view of Queen Anne's court, in essence she and Bucholz are in agreement. Somerset also acknowledges the increasing rarity of courtly entertainments (apart from the birthday celebrations) and confirms that drawing rooms were sporadic, boring and often not attended by the Queen, who in any case 'was not a gifted hostess' and barely spoke to her guests (Anne Somerset, *Queen Anne: The Politics of Passion* (London, 2012), pp. 228-30 (quotation p. 230)).

³⁵ Mary, Duchess of Ormond to Portlock, 25 May 1698, in *H.M.C., Ormonde MSS*, n.s., viii, p. 79.

vicereine outside of Dublin. With his own position in Ireland already firmly established, he did not view her as a necessary component of his viceroyalty.

The superfluous nature of Mary's position was also evident in her artistic patronage as vicereine, for despite being resident in Ireland for two years, it was virtually non-existent.³⁶ She attended the plays and musical recitals held to mark state celebrations, but without obvious influence with the Duke, her value as a patroness was limited.³⁷ This was in striking contrast to her popularity amongst the writers and playwrights of England, where her court position and membership of the prominent Beaufort family added to her prestige.³⁸

Yet despite these limitations, the Duchess's efforts in the social arena of Dublin were moderately successful and her tenure saw noticeable development in the position of the vicereine. She could mix more freely with the men at court than in previous decades, when the two sexes had eaten and socialised separately and although a gender divide can be detected at times, it was a choice rather than a requirement and applied to only some entertainments.³⁹ Furthermore, although the court was underused and large-scale socialising continued to be limited to periods when the Duke was in residence, when together, he and his wife made an excellent team and their parties (and Mary's role in them) were well received and reviewed by contemporary commentators. It is apparent though, that whatever pleasure the Duchess took from these relatively rare occasions was not enough to compensate for the drawbacks of living in a foreign country where she knew few people, outranked all and was

³⁶ On the artistic patronage of lords lieutenant between 1660 and 1780, see Toby Barnard, 'The Lord Lieutenancy and Cultural and Literary Patronage c. 1660–1780', in Gray and Purdue (eds), *The Irish Lord Lieutenancy*, pp. 97–113.

³⁷ Nevertheless, Irish work had been dedicated to her in the 1690s, when her relationship with her husband had appeared less distant. See for example George Wilkins, *The chase of the stag ...* (Dublin, 1699).

³⁸ There were many dedications to the Duchess during the 1690s and early 1700s in which the authors claimed to have chosen her for her descent and court connections, as well as for her husband's position. See for example George Powell, *Alphonso, King of Naples ...* (1691); Nicholas Rowe, *The fair penitent ...* (London, 1703). On the Ormonds' joint patronage of John Dryden, see Jane Ohlmeyer and Steven Zwicker, 'John Dryden, the House of Ormond, and the Politics of Anglo-Irish Patronage', *Historical Journal*, 49 (2006), pp. 677–706.

³⁹ For an example of this earlier gender divide, see Clarendon to Rochester, 20 Nov. 1686, quoted in S. W. Singer (ed.), *The Correspondence of Henry Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, and his Brother Laurence Hyde, Earl of Rochester* (2 vols, London, 1828), vol. II, p. 71.

often without her husband's company. When the Duke was reappointed as lord lieutenant in 1710, she did not return to Ireland with him.

The years between 1707 and 1724 saw a succession of short-reigned viceroys. First was the unmarried 8th Earl of Pembroke in 1707–08, succeeded by Thomas, Earl of Wharton, who held the post from 1708–10, before Ormond's return. The Duke of Shrewsbury was appointed from 1713, followed by two absentees, the Earl of Sunderland (1714–15) and Viscount Townshend (1717), and finally, the dukes of Bolton and Grafton from 1717–19 and 1719–24 respectively.⁴⁰ Of these eight men, only Wharton, Shrewsbury, Bolton and Grafton brought their wives to Ireland and only the Duchess of Grafton came more than once.

II

Lucy, Countess of Wharton represents something of a missed opportunity in the history of the vicereines. Like the Duchess of Ormond, she possessed a range of advantages which seemed to mark her as an ideal candidate. As the daughter and sole heiress of Adam Loftus, Viscount Lisburne, who had died fighting for King William during the siege of Limerick in 1691, she had inherited considerable lands in counties Monaghan, Meath and Dublin and thus an even stronger connection to Ireland than Mary, which could have eased her own and her husband's passage in Irish society.⁴¹ The Earl had long taken an interest in Irish affairs, having visited the country in 1695 and lobbied for the position of Lord Lieutenant in 1696, when the then Lord Deputy, Henry Capel, died in office.⁴² His character and political strategy were well suited to court life, for he was a great believer in combining money with 'personality politics' in order to bribe or charm those whose support he needed.⁴³ This frequently meant organising entertainments for the benefit of his would-be supporters, a technique which required the

⁴⁰ 'Lord Lieutenants of Ireland', *ODNB*.

⁴¹ The National Archives, Prob. 11/406/230, Will of The Right Honourable Adam Viscount Lisburne, 3 Oct. 1691.

⁴² 'Wharton, Thomas (1648–1715)', *Dictionary of Irish Biography* [D.I.B.].

⁴³ Christopher Robbins, *The Earl of Wharton and Whig Party politics, 1679–1715* (Lampeter, 1991), pp. 8–10, 29–30, 37 (quotation from p. 10).

assistance of his wife, for he used their home in Winchendon as a base and entertained there.⁴⁴ He employed the same combination of personality and largesse in his dealings with the Irish, for the age of the single ‘undertaker’ had not yet arrived and the Lord Lieutenant had to deal with a range of people in order to negotiate a difficult political situation. Despite having a personal disregard for religion, he feigned conformity to the Church of England and was known for his political sympathies with Dissenters. Many in Ireland therefore suspected that he would try to revoke the Test clause in the 1704 Popery Act, which limited this group’s rights. In order to overcome this wariness and build support, Wharton’s secretary reported in May 1709 that the Lord Lieutenant had ‘addressed himself to all sorts of men since his arrival here with unspeakable application’.⁴⁵ Later in the summer, when he needed the latest money bill to be passed, Wharton prorogued the Irish Parliament several times and undertook ‘an intensive campaign among the members of both Houses’ to ensure the bill’s success when the MP’s reconvened.⁴⁶

In such an atmosphere, a popular court provided a means for Wharton to pursue his charm offensive and conduct business, especially during parliamentary recesses. The Lord Lieutenant was quick to recognise the political potential of Dublin Castle and cultivated his establishment so assiduously that the Earl of Godolphin grumbled that he ‘seems to apply himself more to making his court in that country than to please his old friends’.⁴⁷ According to John Oldmixon, the Earl’s biographer and kinsman, the result was a brilliant spectacle. ‘Never was there a court at Dublin so accessible, never a lord lieutenant so easy to be

⁴⁴ For some examples of the entertainments and political intrigues taking place in Wharton’s home and Lucy’s involvement, see Susan Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England: The Cultural Worlds of the Verneys 1660–1720* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 163, 165.

⁴⁵ ‘Wharton, Thomas, 1st Marquess of Wharton, 1st Marquess of Malmesbury, and 1st Marquess of Catherlough (1648–1715)’, *ODNB*; Joseph Addison to Baron Halifax, 7 May 1709, in Walter Graham (ed.), *The Letters of Joseph Addison* (Oxford, 1941), p. 134.

⁴⁶ Dralle, ‘Kingdom in Reversion’, p. 404. Jonathan Swift’s pamphlet on Lord Wharton also contains many examples of the Earl’s use of ‘personality politics’ in Ireland: *A Short Character of his Excellency Thomas, Earl of Wharton, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland* (London, 1710).

⁴⁷ Earl of Godolphin to the Duke of Marlborough, 27 June 1709, in *Private Correspondence of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough* (2 vols, London, 1838), vol. II, p. 323.

approached'. At night there were 'balls, gaming tables, and other diversions', including operas composed by Thomas Clayton, a former member of the Royal Private Musick, whom Lord Wharton had brought over from England.⁴⁸ The Earl and Countess welcomed 'the Aldermen and chief citizens' wives'⁴⁹ and according to Oldmixon, Wharton was so popular, 'that his court was crowded with people of quality, who came from England on purpose to have the pleasure of his conversation'.⁵⁰ As for Lucy, she played the part of a gracious hostess, receiving their diverse collection of guests 'with that humanity and easiness, which adorn all the actions of her life' and thereby supporting her husband's political policy.⁵¹ On the surface, they appeared to be the perfect team, with Lucy apparently enjoying the status of the indispensable wife that Mary Butler had so obviously lacked. Yet this second-hand account, written several years after the event, does not tell the whole story, for the Countess's position was relatively weak and beset with problems.

With her comparatively humble background and lack of court experience, Lucy was unable to match the prestige her predecessor had brought to the Castle. In addition, she came to Ireland for only a few months and apparently under duress, for she was recovering from a colic, which some said was fabricated in an attempt to avoid the trip.⁵² The differing political persuasions of her guests must have created difficulties for a hostess whose husband wanted all to feel equally favoured, but Thomas's determination to bring her, hints at a belief that a court and a lord lieutenancy benefited from the presence of a vicereine, even one who, behind her 'humanity and easiness', lacked enthusiasm for the task. Moreover, though Oldmixon mentions the presence of some native politicians and their wives, his comment that it was their English friends making up the numbers at Dublin Castle implies that even with an Irish

⁴⁸ John Oldmixon, *Memoirs of the Life of the Most Noble Thomas, Late Marquess of Wharton* (London, 1715), p. 69. On Thomas Clayton, see *ODNB*, 'Clayton, Thomas (bap. 1673, d. 1725)'.

⁴⁹ Oldmixon, *Memoirs of the Life*, p. 69.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

⁵² Lady Wentworth to Lord Raby, 29 Mar. 1709, in J. J. Cartwright (ed.), *The Wentworth Papers, 1705-1739* (London, 1883), p. 80.

vicereine in residence, the court struggled to attract Irish guests.⁵³ The couple's reputations and even their personalities, which had seemed so appealing at first, may not have helped matters. Thomas was a renowned rake and Lucy's morals and behaviour were also considered poor.⁵⁴ The Earl of Godolphin described her as 'very diverting for a little while, to take and leave as one pleases, but terrible indeed to be tied to', while Lady Mary Wortley Montagu summed her up as 'a woman equally unfeeling and unprincipled; flattering, fawning, canting, affecting prudery and even sanctity'.⁵⁵ Neither husband nor wife seemed to mind the other's flaws though and they never separated, despite the questionable paternity of Lucy's children. In fact, Swift claimed that the Earl 'bore the gallantries of his lady with the indifference of a stoic; and thought them well recompensed by a return of children to support his family, without the fatigues of being a father'.⁵⁶ Society was not so forgiving, and many in England avoided their company.⁵⁷ Perhaps something similar occurred in Ireland.

Nevertheless, some progress can be detected in the function of the court and the activities of the vicereine. Dublin Castle under the Whartons appears as a much livelier and more extravagant place than in previous years. Although social functions seem to have been more regular and informal than previously, there remained an element of continuity in the way in which the court was managed, for the Whartons co-hosted events and their Irish guests were of a similar class to those entertained by the Ormonds. Given the brevity of Lucy's stay, it is unsurprising that there is no evidence either of any patronage of the arts on her part, or that she had a hand in selecting the entertainments provided for her guests. Instead it is the Earl who appears as the sole mastermind behind their establishment. Even

⁵³ Using Oldmixon, Dralle provided a similar description to that given here of the Whartons' court and its political significance, but he took a more positive view of its popularity amongst the Irish (Dralle, 'Kingdom in Reversion', p. 414).

⁵⁴ 'Wharton, Thomas, 1st Marquess of Wharton', *ODNB*.

⁵⁵ Godolphin to Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, 16 Oct. 1706, in Henry L. Snyder (ed.), *The Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence* (3 vols, Oxford, 1975), vol. II, p. 713; Lord Wharncliffe (ed.), *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Monagu* (3 vols, Paris, 1837), vol. I, pp. 49-50.

⁵⁶ Swift, *A Short Character*, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Wharncliffe (ed.), *The Letters and Works*, vol. I, pp. 31, 49-50.

had she not been pregnant in 1710, it is debatable if she would have returned with Thomas for his final visit.

III

Little can be said regarding the vicereines of the following eight years. The Duchess of Ormond did not return between 1710 and 1713 and no direct evidence survives regarding the visit in 1713-14 of Adelaide Talbot, the Italian-born Duchess of Shrewsbury. During her stay, the usual round of official celebrations continued and Adelaide's presence as hostess can be assumed at events such as the concert, play, ball and fireworks display for Queen Anne's birthday in 1714.⁵⁸ The Duke ate publicly three days a week and always put on a show worthy of his position, for his table was attended by a bevy of servants and musicians to entertain those present and was filled with expensive and exotic dishes, including vermicelli, a choice which suggests the influence of his wife.⁵⁹ An account of their domestic arrangements at the Castle survives, providing a rare glimpse into inner workings of a viceregal household. Their staff numbered 106, though 'it is not possible to categorise all of these exactly, but about thirty might be called upper servant or courtiers (steward, comptroller, chaplain, gentlemen ushers, gentlemen of the bedchamber, gentlemen-at-large, and aides-de-camp).' In addition, there were twenty-four kitchen staff, 'four or five miscellaneous' others and 'thirteen women servants, eight servants attending "the great hall", twelve footmen and twelve stable servants'.⁶⁰ All in all, an impressive retinue. After the Shrewsburys' departure, the following two lords lieutenant were absentees and it was 1717 before another vicereine arrived.

Henrietta Powlett, Duchess of Bolton had certain advantages over the previous three vicereines. Despite her own and her father's illegitimacy, her status as a grand-daughter of

⁵⁸ *Post Boy* (1695), 13-16 Feb. 1714.

⁵⁹ McParland, *Public Architecture*, p. 100.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 99. See also *The Establishment of H.G. the Duke of Shrewsbury's House in Dublin Castle, 1713* (Royal Irish Academy, MS 24 H 22, fols. 1-46).

Charles II (through his eldest son, the Duke of Monmouth), provided her with a prominent pedigree and she was known to act as though ‘she was one of the royal family’.⁶¹ Her court experience held her in good stead too, for she was a lady-in-waiting to Caroline, Princess of Wales, whose court was considerably livelier than that of the late Queen Anne.⁶² The Duchess was already familiar with Ireland, having married her husband (then Marquess of Winchester and a lord justice of Ireland) there and given birth to their son in Dublin in 1698, but like many before her, the evidence regarding her time as vicereine is frustratingly sparse.⁶³ Soon after their arrival, the Boltons attended a play given in their honour and dined with, among others, the Irish Lord Chancellor, Alan Brodrick, who noted that Henrietta spoke of his daughter, Alice, who was then living in England, ‘in a great deal of company in the handsomest and most obliging manner in the world’.⁶⁴ No further evidence of any interest in or support for Irish culture is forthcoming though, and beyond these snippets, we can only speculate as to how the Duchess employed her time. The recurring problems faced by vicereines of this era of a shortage of time in Ireland and a lack of interest or ability in running a court, seem likely explanations.

The Duchess of Bolton did bring a fresh political edge to the position however. The use of a single ‘undertaker’ was by now becoming standard and Henrietta’s social attentions demonstrated this, for her friendly treatment of Alan Brodrick, who was also a distant relation, and the notice she had taken of his daughter Alice when they had met in England, suggested to the world what Brodrick already assumed to be true, that the Duke would favour him over his great rival, William Conolly, Speaker of the Irish House of Commons.⁶⁵ Once

⁶¹ *Diary of Mary Countess Cowper, Lady of the Bedchamber to the Princess of Wales, 1714–1720* (London, 1864), p. 80.

⁶² ‘Paulet [Powlett], Charles, 2nd Duke of Bolton (c.1661-1722)’, *ODNB*; ‘Caroline [Princess Caroline of Brandenburg-Ansbach] (1683-1737)’ in *ibid.*; J. M. Beattie, *The English Court in the Reign of George I* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 261-78.

⁶³ ‘Paulet [Powlett], Charles, 2nd Duke of Bolton’, *ODNB*; *Post Boy* (1695), 5-7 July 1698. It is unclear why Henrietta Crofts, as she was then, was in Dublin in the late 1690s.

⁶⁴ SHC, MS 1248/4/57-58, Lord Brodrick to Thomas Brodrick, 8 Aug. 1717.

⁶⁵ ‘Brodrick, Alan, 1st Viscount Midleton (1655/6-1728)’, *D.I.B.*

again, the political situation and the viceroy's reaction to it dictated the tone of the court, making it more factional than in Wharton's time and the vicereine more fastidious in her choice of friends.

From 1720 until 1724, the Lord Lieutenant was Charles Fitzroy, 2nd Duke of Grafton. As a prominent courtier and, like the Duchess of Bolton, a grandchild of Charles II, he was eminently suitable (on a social level at least) for the role of viceroy.⁶⁶ Grafton's wife, also called Henrietta, was a niece of the Duchess of Ormond, but had no background in a royal household and presumably only limited experience of the Hanoverian court, having spent much of the 1710s pregnant. Like the Duke of Bolton, Grafton had previously been a lord justice of Ireland (from 1715–17) and he and his wife had visited the country between November 1715 and June 1716, though no evidence of the Duchess's experiences there survives.⁶⁷ Fortunately her time as vicereine is better documented. She was in Ireland in 1721–22 and 1723–24, though on the first occasion, she was again expecting a baby and left before her husband, presumably wishing to give birth in England.⁶⁸ The Duke preferred revelry to work and despite his recent experience as lord justice, his grasp of Irish affairs remained weak. As a result, he was over-reliant on his 'undertaker' of choice, William Conolly. The court reflected the man, and although the Duke attempted to combine politics and pleasure, holding levees during which he received Irish politicians, his behaviour betrayed his priorities. In 1722, Brodrick, now Viscount Midleton, reported,

⁶⁶ 'Lord Lieutenants of Ireland', *ODNB*.

⁶⁷ The couple were married in 1713 and had had four children by 1718. Their son, Lord Augustus Fitzroy, was born in mid October 1716, indicating that the Duchess was with her husband in Ireland at the beginning of the year. Fredrick Barlow, *The Complete English Peerage* (2 vols, London, 1772–3), vol. I, p. 85; *British Mercury*, 14–21 Apr. 1714; *Evening Post* (1709), 8–10 Nov. 1715; *Flying Post or The Post Master*, 26–28 June 1716; 'FitzRoy, Charles, 2nd Duke of Grafton (1683–1757)', *ODNB*.

⁶⁸ *Daily Journal*, 3 Feb. 1722; *Post Boy*, 12 Apr. 1722; *British Journal*, 3 Aug. 1723; *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer*, 23 May 1724.

I am just come from the Castle being told among others who attended the Duke's levee that he was in bed and in a sweat and should not rise in an hour, having been up dancing till seven this morning.⁶⁹

Soon, the limits of Grafton's abilities and the cost of his failure to cultivate a stronger and wider following became apparent, for his viceroyalty was to finish under a cloud caused by the Wood's halfpence crisis. The crisis arose in 1722 after George I granted the rights to mint copper coinage in Ireland to his mistress, the Duchess of Kendal. She then sold these rights to an English ironmaster, William Wood, who was accused of flooding the market with debased coinage, which the Irish refused to accept on the grounds that it would damage their economy.⁷⁰ The situation soon escaped Grafton's control as the Irish undertakers refused to support the patent, leading Prime Minister Robert Walpole to remark that the Lord Lieutenant was nothing more than 'a fair weather pilot that knew not what he had to do, when the first storm arose'.⁷¹ The episode highlighted that in times of need, skill as a host without skill as a politician was insufficient to attract supporters, for the Castle was 'almost wholly deserted, and indeed the levees are not so full as one would wish'.⁷²

The Duchess's social activities as vicereine during her first trip were unavoidably curtailed by the brevity of her stay and her pregnancy. She did provide informal entertainments for some of Dublin's leading ladies at the Castle, but it was not until her second visit in 1723, that she presided with her husband over the celebrations marking the anniversary of George I's coronation.⁷³ When entertaining alone, her guests included the wealthy Katherine Conolly, wife of the Speaker, whom Henrietta may have met in 1715–16

⁶⁹ SHC, MS 1248/5/165-166, Lord Midleton to Thomas Brodrick, 5 Jan. 1721/2.

⁷⁰ McNally, 'Wood's Halfpence', p. 355.

⁷¹ Robert Walpole to Lord Townshend, 26 Oct. 1723, in William Coxe, *Memoirs of the Life and Administration of Sir Robert Walpole, Earl of Orford*, (3 vols, London, 1798), vol. II, pp. 285-6.

⁷² SHC, MS 1248/5/362-365, Midleton to Thomas Brodrick, 19 Jan. 1723/4.

⁷³ *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer*, 2 Nov. 1723.

when their husbands initially became friendly.⁷⁴ Katherine prided herself on never visiting anyone, preferring the status she gained by having her friends and acquaintances come to her, but she made a rare exception on ‘some evenings that I went to the Castle to wait on the Duchess of Grafton’, even taking her nephew’s wife, Constance Conyngham, along on one occasion ‘to introduce her to the Duchess’.⁷⁵ Though apparently innocuous and unimportant, these gatherings marked a shift in the manner in which the court and the vicereine functioned.

First, Katherine Conolly was not the only one making a concession by visiting the Duchess of Grafton. Though she may simply have been seeking to avoid the boredom and loneliness suffered by her aunt, the Duchess nevertheless broke with past practice by hosting and socialising with those of a rank so much lower than her own, and the favour of the vicereine, even if she were a duchess, would never be as exclusive again.

Second, had anyone wished to know where the Duke’s allegiances lay, they need only have looked to his wife and the multiple invitations she extended to William Conolly’s female relations. The Duchess’s selective socialising functioned like a barometer of viceregal favour, flattering some and offending others. In particular, Lord Midleton chafed that this favouritism was not directed towards him and his family: before the Graftons had arrived, he was complaining that ‘one day his [*Conolly*’s] minions talk of a mighty kind letter received, the next his lady reads a letter from a certain duchess’. In stark contrast to his reaction three years earlier when his daughter had been publicly complimented by a vicereine, he now wrote that ‘though it may be reasonably expected that a letter of compliment should find an answer, I do not think it very proper to have such letters read or publicly shown’. This, he felt, had been done for political reasons and ‘to support an opinion of a great interest’.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ ‘FitzRoy, Charles, 2nd Duke of Grafton’, *ODNB*.

⁷⁵ NLI, MS 41, 578/3, Katherine Conolly to Jane Bonnell, 22 Jan. 1721/2. This reference to Constance Conyngham (who married Katherine’s nephew in 1719) and the date of this letter, written just as the Duchess returned to England, indicate that Mrs Conolly is here referring to Henrietta’s time as vicereine only and not to her trip to Ireland in 1715–16. See also same to same, 25 July 1719 (*ibid*).

⁷⁶ SHC, MS 1248/4/292-293, Midleton to Thomas Brodrick, 29 July 1720.

Though Henrietta's social circle was probably sanctioned and even orchestrated by her husband, like that of most other vicereines (if not all), the results show the danger in having the viceroy's wife behave in such an obviously biased manner, for she could damage relationships which her husband ought to have been nurturing. Her return visit and efforts as a hostess were the clearest signs yet though, that the vicereine was becoming an 'incorporated wife'; that is, a woman whose actions were often distinct from her husband's, yet still complemented his own activities and interests.⁷⁷ Henrietta's attempts may have been short-lived, sporadic and more problematic than useful, but they were a portent of what was to come, as was her involvement in the arts.

The Duchess of Grafton's cultural patronage was slightly more successful than that of her predecessors and several of Ireland's poets chose her as the focus of their work or its dedication.⁷⁸ Her three visits to Ireland between 1715 and 1723 made her a more familiar presence than any vicereine since the Duchess of Ormond, while her frequent pregnancies and almost constant presence at her husband's side suggested a good relationship and probable influence with the Duke. Harnessing this presumed influence was the ultimate goal of those who wrote such tributes, for they wished to use the vicereine in order to obtain the patronage of the lord lieutenant and as a result they invariably complimented him in their offerings to her.⁷⁹ Despite such unflattering undertones though, this method of using the viceroy's wife marked another sign of the growth in her position.

With the arrival of Henrietta's successor, Frances, Baroness Carteret, these modifications to the social and cultural role of the vicereine were adopted and expanded upon to much greater effect. Her unprecedented involvement in and control over the Dublin establishment would make both her and her court a resounding success.

⁷⁷ Hilary Callan and Shirley Ardener (eds), *The Incorporated Wife* (London, 1984). See also K. D. Reynolds, *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 1998), p. 43.

⁷⁸ See for example Matthew Concanen, *Poems, Upon Several Occasions* (Dublin, 1722); Patrick Delany, *To the Dutchess [sic] of Grafton* (Dublin, 1723).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

IV

Frances Carteret (figure 2) had never held a court position, but was familiar with the London establishments of the King and his eldest son and daughter-in-law thanks to her husband's position as a lord of the bedchamber to George I.⁸⁰ She was an experienced hostess in her own right and her friend and distant relation, Mary Pendarves, wrote on many occasions of the entertainments at Lady Carteret's house and of the operas, plays and court functions they attended together.⁸¹ From the point of view of the Irish, Frances flattered them by showing an early and sustained commitment to her new role, indicating her intention to remain in Ireland for some time by bringing her young daughters with her and accompanying her husband on all of his visits, making a total of thirty months spent in the country over the course of five and a half years.⁸²

John, Baron Carteret was an excellent politician whose ability to speak German had helped to secure him a place of favour with George I. He acted as a lord justice in England during the King's absences and was ambassador to Sweden in 1719-20. But his appointment to Ireland was the result of his long-running rivalry with Robert Walpole, rather than his political skills. Having been outmaneuvered and forced to resign from his position as Secretary of State by Walpole in April 1724, he was appointed Lord Lieutenant the following month and sent to Ireland as a form of political exile. Not only were he and his wife one of the few resident viceregal couples of the early eighteenth century with no prior experience of Ireland, they also knew from the outset that their time there would be long, providing a

⁸⁰ 'Carteret, John, 2nd Earl Granville (1690-1763)', *ODNB*.

⁸¹ See for example, Pendarves to Dewes, 30 May 1724, in *Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville*, vol. I, p. 99; same to same, 8 Nov. 1726 (*ibid.*, p. 124); same to same, [12 Oct. 1727] (*ibid.*, p. 139).

⁸² The couple were in Ireland from November 1724 until April 1726, from November 1727 until May 1728 and from September 1729 until April 1730 (*Daily Post*, 4 Nov. 1724; *Evening Post*, 5-7 Apr. 1726; *Daily Journal*, 29 Nov. 1727; *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer*, 25 May 1728; *Daily Courant*, 23 Sept. 1729; *London Evening Post*, 30 Apr.-2 May 1730).

different perspective on Frances's decision to bring her daughters along.⁸³ The anticipated length of the posting also made a successful and popular viceroyalty all the more important, partly to make their stay more bearable and partly to repair the damage done to Carteret's reputation and take revenge upon those who had slighted him. There was also the added pressure created by Grafton's recent failings with regards to the Wood's halfpence crisis, a crisis which Carteret had ironically encouraged while still Secretary of State, in order to frustrate Walpole.⁸⁴ Not only was the episode an embarrassment to the English government, it had undermined the position of the viceroy in Ireland and the power of British rule there.⁸⁵

The ongoing coinage dispute overshadowed the first year of Carteret's viceroyalty. As Grafton had discovered, the undertakers' opposition to the patent made governing through them temporarily impossible and Carteret was forced to rule alone until 1725, when the patent was withdrawn and Wood was given a £3,000 pension as compensation.⁸⁶ As the Lord Lieutenant sought to create a power-base independent of faction, he was 'indefatigable in the business of his government'⁸⁷ and his court offered a neutral venue to meet, entertain and work with the Irish politicians.⁸⁸ In subsequent years, he was forced to turn to William Conolly for assistance when it became clear that under normal circumstances, 'undertakers were a necessary evil',⁸⁹ but the Castle remained a venue at which parliamentary matters were discussed and decisions made.⁹⁰ In this situation, it was clear that an innovative and enthusiastic vicereine was needed.

Lady Carteret was willing and able to do what her husband required of her and to entertain those with opposing political beliefs. Her efforts to create a less polarised court

⁸³ 'Carteret, John, 2nd Earl Granville' *ODNB*; Lady Carteret to Charlotte Clayton, 19 Dec. 1724, in A. T. Thompson (ed.), *Memoirs of Viscountess Sundon, Mistress of the Robes to Queen Caroline, Consort of King George II* (2 vols, London, 1848), vol. I, p. 124.

⁸⁴ 'Carteret, John (1690–1763)', *D.I.B.*

⁸⁵ McNally, 'Wood's Halfpence', p. 354.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 362–3; 'Wood, William (1671–1730)', *ODNB*.

⁸⁷ *Daily Journal*, 1 Nov. 1725.

⁸⁸ McNally, 'Wood's Halfpence', p. 365.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 371.

⁹⁰ See for example Lord Brodrick to Thomas Brodrick, 9 July 1727 (SHC, MS 1248/7/77–78).

were in sharp contrast to those of the duchesses of Bolton and Grafton. A resemblance to Lady Wharton's activities is discernible, but Lady Carteret was a far more impressive and effective vicereine, for she had more time in which to put her natural flair for entertaining to good use and a greater willingness to do so. Newspapers reported that 'all company are entertained' by the Carterets and that the Lord Lieutenant lived 'very splendidly'.⁹¹ There was 'dancing once a week' (apparently a new departure) and the couple entertained together at plays, balls and banquets held at Dublin Castle to mark the traditional holidays and anniversaries.⁹² Such frequent entertainments were unusual enough, but while most vicereines had been content with (or limited to) the fulfilment of their duties as their husbands' hostess, Lady Carteret went much further, adding to her joint ventures with her husband a social life of her own which complemented his. While he supported his political ambitions with levees and an 'open table two days a week', she drew inspiration from the royal court and held 'two drawing rooms a week, in a princely manner', just as the Princess of Wales had done when she arrived in England.⁹³ In so doing, Frances was building upon the fledgling efforts of the Duchess of Grafton to entertain alone and helping to establish an intense social programme and sense of routine not previously seen at Dublin Castle.

In tandem with these changes, the Carterets pursued a well implemented cultural campaign. As well as the plays and concerts commissioned for Castle events, they attended outside musical, theatrical and even scientific performances together.⁹⁴ Their support was highly sought after and in Dublin, in 1725, one report stated that 'Monsieur Signior Beneditti perform'd, but the Lord Lieutenant and Lady Carteret not being there, he had not so good an

⁹¹ *Daily Journal*, 1 Nov. 1725.

⁹² *Ibid.* For example, on Princess Caroline's birthday in 1725, 'Lord Carteret ordered a play to acted for the diversion of the ladies', while five years later, the birthday of Queen Caroline (as she had become) was celebrated at Dublin Castle with 'a fine ball and entertainment suitable to the joyful occasion' (*Newcastle Courant*, 20 Mar. 1725; *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer*, 14 Mar. 1730).

⁹³ *Daily Journal*, 1 Nov. 1725; Beattie, *The English court*, p. 262.

⁹⁴ For example, see *Daily Post*, 2 Dec. 1724.

audience as Madam Stradiotte.’⁹⁵ Another wrote that the ‘Gentlemen of the theatre ... hope to find encouragement from his Excellency and Lady’.⁹⁶ As well the potential enjoyment to be found in these excursions, such activities also increased the viceroy and vicereine’s public profile and advertised their sophistication and commitment to Irish interests. This broadened the appeal of the Lord Lieutenant’s regime and made it more palatable to the wide selection of Irish politicians with whom he was trying to do business. Under the guise of attending a social event with his wife, he could even use the theatre as an additional or alternative venue to meet and build ties with such men, particularly after he began using Conolly as his undertaker and the Castle lost some of its political neutrality. Indeed this may help to explain the correlation between higher audience numbers and the Carterets’ presence at an event.

As Frances’s public profile increased and it became clear that she and her husband’s artistic interests and patronage were shared, the idea of using her as a conduit to her husband’s favour was seized upon more and more by those looking to improve their chances of obtaining or retaining viceregal patronage. The practice of using the vicereine as the subject or dedicatee of literary work, which had been in its infancy during the Duchess of Grafton’s time, now took off, further improving the cultural credentials and allure of Frances and the court. There were tributes from Jonathan Swift (a great friend of the Carterets and of Frances’s mother, Lady Worsley), Patrick Delany and Thomas Sheridan.⁹⁷ The wording of these accolades always made it clear that Lord Carteret’s favour remained the ultimate prize and that Frances was merely an intermediary, rather than a separate patroness, but the effect

⁹⁵ *Daily Journal*, 13 Nov. 1725.

⁹⁶ *Mist’s Weekly Journal*, 13 Nov. 1725.

⁹⁷ ‘An Apology to the Lady Carteret’. For Patrick Delany’s riddle inscribed to Frances, and Swift’s reply, see *Miscellanea. The second volume. I. An essay upon gibing. With a project for its improvement...* (2 vols, London, 1726), vol. II, pp. 82-4; Sophocles, *The Philoctetes of Sophocles. Translated from the Greek* (Dublin, 1725). See also M.B. [i.e. Jonathan Swift?], *The Widow’s Address to the Rt. Hon. the Lady Carteret* (Dublin, 1725?); *An Epistle in Behalf of Our Irish Poets. To the Right Hon. Lady C---t [Carteret]* (Dublin, 1726). On Swift’s friendship with the Carterets and Worsleys, see Ballantyne, *Lord Carteret*, pp. 16–17.

her presence had been undeniable.⁹⁸ As Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote, ‘so powerfull is the Influence of Lord Carteret’s Wit and my Lady’s Beauty, the Irish Rhime that never Rhime’d before.’⁹⁹ Clearly, the Dublin court had changed.

The reaction to these changes was overwhelmingly positive. Just five months into her first visit, Frances had become such a popular hostess that Swift joked that the Earl of Kerry’s sister-in-law, Mrs FitzMaurice, would soon ‘fall out with my Lady Carteret for drawing away her company’.¹⁰⁰ By 1729, it was noted that when the couple were in Dublin, ‘we may expect the town to fill’, and although this may be partly attributed to the numerous politicians with whom Lord Carteret had to meet, the lure that Frances and her court played in this influx should not go unrecognised.¹⁰¹ That same year a young woman by the name of Sarah Worth complained that ‘Lady Carteret has disappointed the ladies mightily, for the chicken pox confined her [a] month and last week her ladyship miscarried so that we young folks are threatened with the terrible apprehension of having no more drawing-room this winter.’¹⁰² These comments show how integral the court and the lord lieutenant’s wife were becoming to polite society. Her husband’s court needed courtiers to succeed as a political entity and Frances’s efforts to create an establishment which would entice a wide cross-section of the Irish elite away from the competition showed that she understood this responsibility perfectly: Swift called her ‘the best queen we have known in Ireland these many years’.¹⁰³

Lady Carteret’s many achievements would cause problems for her successor. A new sense of expectation had been created around the Castle and the vicereine which demanded

⁹⁸ For example, Thomas Sheridan wrote in the dedication of his translation of Sophocles that he had chosen Frances as the dedicatee in order to thank her husband for attending one of his plays. In a further attempt to attract the Lord Lieutenant’s attention, he went on to suggest that Frances show her husband this latest work (Sophocles, *The Philoctetes of Sophocles*).

⁹⁹ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to Lady Mar, [?] Aug. 1725, in Robert Halsband (ed.), *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu 1708–1720* (3 vols, Oxford, 1965–7), vol. II, p. 56.

¹⁰⁰ Jonathan Swift to Mrs [?] Pratt, 18 Mar. 1724/5, in David Woolley (ed.), *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, D. D.* (4 vols, Oxford, 1999–2007), vol. II, p. 550.

¹⁰¹ Marmaduke Coghill to Edward Southwell, sr, 12 Aug. 1729, in D. W. Hayton (ed.), *Letters of Marmaduke Coghill: 1722–1728* (Dublin, 2005), p. 72.

¹⁰² NLI, MS 41, 580/27, Sarah Worth to Bonnell, 11 Dec. [1729].

¹⁰³ Swift to Lady Worsley, 19 Apr. 1730, in *Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, vol. III, p. 304.

that the former be a glamorous social and political hub, and the latter a prominent factor in making it so, but Elizabeth, Duchess of Dorset, the next vicereine, struggled to succeed. Although she and her husband would ultimately provide an establishment more visually stunning than that of the Carterets, it was to be an exercise in style over substance.

V

Unlike his predecessor, the Duke of Dorset had actively sought the lord lieutenancy and in theory, he and his wife were an ideal viceroy and vicereine, high ranking and familiar with court life. A former maid of honour to Queen Anne, Elizabeth (figure 3) had remained at court after the Hanoverian succession, first as a lady of the bedchamber to the Princess of Wales and then as Mistress of the Robes when the Princess became Queen.¹⁰⁴ She had significant experience as a hostess too, for the Duke was a sociable man who ‘lived in great hospitality all his life’. Their seat was at Knole and ‘on Sundays the front of the house was so crowded with horsemen and carriages, as to give it rather the appearance of a princely levee than the residence of a private nobleman’.¹⁰⁵

Despite very different political circumstances, her husband attempted to rule without a primary undertaker as Wharton and Carteret had done. Like them, he tried to use the court to create a personal following which stood above party, but he lacked their political finesse and work ethic and the plan was poorly executed. In attempting to show favour to all, his patronage was spread too thinly to do any real good and instead of projecting the air of sociability and approachability which Wharton and Carteret had mastered, he appeared aloof and disinterested in those around him, a shortcoming shared by his wife.¹⁰⁶

Elizabeth did not possess the energetic and engaging presence of her immediate predecessor, for she was reluctant to embrace fully her new position, perhaps feeling

¹⁰⁴ ‘Sackville, Lionel Cranfield, 1st Duke of Dorset (1688-1765)’, *ODNB*.

¹⁰⁵ John Bridgman, *An Historical and Topographical Sketch of Knole, in Kent: With a Brief Genealogy of the Sackville Family* (London, 1817), p. 114.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Clayton to Charlotte Clayton, 9 Nov. 1731, in *Memoirs of Viscountess Sundon*, vol. II, pp. 155-6.

intimidated by her new surroundings and the many unfamiliar faces. Descriptions of her character, and comparisons between her and Lady Carteret vary depending on the source, but taken together, they give the impression of a shy and introverted woman. In the first month after the Dorsets' arrival in Dublin in September 1731,¹⁰⁷ one observer reported that 'the Duchess behaves herself very humbly',¹⁰⁸ while Mary Pendarves was quick to make a connection between Elizabeth's temperament and problems in her social programme. She felt that the vicereine's disposition prevented her from reaching the same social heights and popularity that Frances Carteret had enjoyed, writing that

great preparations are making against the birthday. There are to be no balls at court, but on such public days; Lady Carteret used to have balls once a week, but they brought so great a crowd, that the Duchess, who is of a quiet spirit, will avoid them.¹⁰⁹

Conflicting reports came from Robert Clayton, Bishop of Killala, who may have been influenced by his friendship with the Dorsets and a desire to see Elizabeth do well. At first he claimed to 'hear from the ladies, that she is much more acceptable to them than Lady Carteret. Her behaviour is with less hauteur; it is more polite, and less proud.'¹¹⁰ Three months later though, he admitted that while the viceregal couple had shown him and his wife 'particular marks of distinction', the Duchess was 'very civil and polite, but very silent in public; in private, she seems to be more at ease within herself, but not much given to unnecessary discourse'.¹¹¹

The Duke was particularly fond of opera and music and he made efforts to promote both at the Castle, employing Matthew Duborg as his chief composer and commissioning musical odes for the royal birthdays as well as the more traditional plays seen in earlier

¹⁰⁷ *London Evening Post*, 4-7 Sept. 1731.

¹⁰⁸ PRONI, D2707/A/1/2/76B, Unknown to Henry Boyle, 17 Sept. 1731.

¹⁰⁹ Pendarves to Dewes, 26 Sept. 1731, in *Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville*, vol. I, p. 290.

¹¹⁰ Robert Clayton to Charlotte Clayton, 28 Sept. 1731, in *Memoirs of Viscountess Sundon*, vol. II, p. 84.

¹¹¹ Same to same, 2 Jan. 1731/2 (*ibid.*, p. 23).

viceroalties.¹¹² Elizabeth provided only the minimum artistic patronage required by her new position. She attended musical and operatic performances with her husband when they were for charitable causes and made the occasional trip to the theatre when required (for example the opening of the new Theatre Royal on Aungier's Street in 1734), but her name did not appear in newspaper reports of cultural events nearly as often as Lady Carteret's had.¹¹³ Even when she attended balls and *ridottos* outside the Castle, she often excused herself from dancing or left before the dancing had begun.¹¹⁴ Given her lack of enthusiasm, it is unsurprising that she was not approached for support by writers as frequently as Frances had been, (though a few did still venture to dedicate their work to her) and her attitude cost her an opportunity to popularise herself and her husband's court.¹¹⁵

Fortunately, with time Elizabeth improved, and although the court's use as a political tool remained underdeveloped (thanks to her husband), once she began to entertain, its reputation soared. The Duchess acquitted herself as a capable, if slightly reluctant, society hostess, who made the establishment at Dublin Castle more similar than ever to its London counterpart and the position of the lord lieutenant's wife comparable to that of a queen.

Taking her cue from several earlier vicereines, the Duchess joined forces with her husband and together they presided over many events, hosting musical performances and celebrating state anniversaries with sumptuous balls.¹¹⁶ These celebrations were hugely successful and at the party in Dublin Castle to mark George II's birthday in November 1731, around a thousand people were in attendance, instead of the expected six hundred (figure

¹¹² See for example William Dunkin, *An Ode, to be Performed at the Castle of Dublin, on the 1st. of March, Being the Birth-day of Her Most Excellent and Sacred Majesty Queen Caroline. By the special command of His Grace the Duke of Dorset, ... Set to music by Mr. Matthew Dubourg, Chief Composer and Master of the Music, attending His Majesty's State in Ireland* (Dublin, 1734); *London Gazette*, 16-20 Oct. 1733.

¹¹³ *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, 17 Apr. 1736; *Daily Courant*, 19 Mar. 1734. For further information on the vicereines' philanthropic activities, see Rachel Wilson, 'The Roles of Elite Women in Ireland, 1690-1745' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 2013), ch. 6.

¹¹⁴ Pendarves to Dewes, 30 Mar. 1732, in *Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville*, vol. I, p. 345.

¹¹⁵ For examples of dedications to the Duchess, see John Barclay, *The Adventures of Poliarchus and Argenis ...* (Dublin, 1734); William Hammond, *Advice to a Son ...* (Dublin, 1736).

¹¹⁶ Pendarves to Bernard Granville, 7 Mar. 1731/2, in *Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville*, vol. I, p. 337.

4).¹¹⁷ Mrs Pendarves reported that ‘there were two rooms for dancing’ along with another in which there was ‘a supper ordered after the manner of the masquerade, where everybody went at what hour they liked best, and vast profusion of meat and drink, which you may be sure has gained the *hearts* of all guzzlers!’. To top it all off, ‘the Duke and Duchess broke through their reserved way and were very obliging’.¹¹⁸ Other parties were equally popular, if boisterous, and in March 1732, Mrs Pendarves wrote that when the supper was produced late in the evening,

the hurly burly is not to be described; squalling, shrieking, all sorts of noises; some ladies lost their lappets, others were trod upon. Poor Lady Santry almost lost her breath in the scuffle, and fanned herself two hours before she could recover herself enough to know if she was dead or alive.¹¹⁹

Of all the earlier lord lieutenants’ wives, the influence of Lady Carteret was felt the most, for after the Duchess’s initial hesitation surrounding weekly balls — the absence of which would have amounted to a serious step backwards — by November 1731 Elizabeth had capitulated and was hosting ‘a drawing-room twice a week, in the evenings, at one of which there is always a ball’. At these events, the Duchess welcomed those of varying social and political backgrounds,¹²⁰ but ‘hurly burly’ was not to be found and instead they were ‘very orderly and handsome’.¹²¹ On a typical evening, Mrs Pendarves wrote,

there is placed a basset table, at which the Duchess of Dorset sits down after she has received and made her compliments to the company. It is very seldom any ladies sit

¹¹⁷ NLI, MS 41, 578/6, Katherine Conolly to Bonnell, 3 Nov. 1731.

¹¹⁸ Pendarves to Dewes, 4 Nov. 1731, in *Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville*, vol. I, p. 309.

¹¹⁹ Same to Bernard Granville, 7 Mar. 1731/2 (*ibid.*, p. 338).

¹²⁰ Lady Elizabeth Germain to Swift, 23 Feb. 1731/2, in *Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, vol. III, p. 457; IAA, MS A/9, Lady Anne Conolly to Lord Strafford, 31 Oct. 1733. Guests ranged from the aristocratic Lady Anne Conolly to the untitled, though well connected, Mary Pendarves.

¹²¹ Robert Clayton to Charlotte Clayton, 9 Nov. 1731, in *Memoirs of Viscountess Sundon*, vol. II, p. 156.

down to basset, but quadrille parties are made in the other rooms, and such idle ones as I saunter up and down, or pick up some acquaintance to chat with.¹²²

Although the style of Elizabeth's hospitality emulated that of Frances in its unpartisan nature and frequency, it also had roots in her own familiarity with the royal court which, combined with her husband's seven-year stint as lord lieutenant, compensated for her shyness and reticence. By making minor adaptations to the model established by Lady Carteret, she was able to give her gatherings a regal twist even more noticeable than in the previous regime, and the card games at her drawing rooms echoed her hours with Queen Caroline and the princesses when in England.¹²³ Contemporaries who were familiar with the King and Queen's courts noted further similarities, and Mary Pendarves found her experience in the Duchess's court 'just the same as at St. James'.¹²⁴ The scale and presentation was also comparable to the royal court and it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Elizabeth and her husband were deliberately striving to provide Dublin with an unmistakably regal court which would increase their prestige, rival the other entertainments available and advance the Duke's plan to govern independently of Irish politicians, whilst promoting the benefits of English rule in Ireland.¹²⁵

In the first two objectives at least, they were successful. In October 1733, the English-born Lady Anne Conolly gushed over the birthday celebrations in honour of George II, telling her father that the ballroom was 'the prettiest thing I ever saw' and the food 'finer than anything I ever saw, in my life'. The Duchess had spent virtually the entire day entertaining guests and after attending a musical recital at one o'clock and holding a drawing-room until

¹²² Pendarves to Dewes, 26 Sept. 1731, in *Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville*, vol. I, p. 290.

¹²³ Lady Strafford to Lord Strafford, 25 May 1729, in *Wentworth Papers*, p. 458.

¹²⁴ Pendarves to Dewes, 26 Sept. 1731, in *Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville*, vol. I, p. 290.

¹²⁵ On the entertainments available to Dublin society by the early 1730s, see Pendarves to Anne Granville, 9 Dec. 1731 (*ibid.*, vol. III, pp. 327-9). Katherine Conolly's home was also a popular alternative to the Castle and there is some suggestion that she deliberately tried to outshine the Dorsets (Barnard, *Making the Grand Figure*, p. 74).

three, four hours later, ‘all the ladies of quality was had into the drawing room to wait till the Duchess came out to attend her to the ballroom, where there was the best seats kept for them’. This use of a select group of women to escort her to the ballroom was an innovation and resembled a queen with her ladies-in-waiting. Although this tactic favoured some at the expense of others, both Elizabeth and the Duke worked hard to please all of their guests, for they were ‘excessive [sic] civil to everybody’. Her reluctance to socialise was still in evidence, for she left the party before many of her guests, but had she read Lady Anne’s letter, she could have been sure of her success as a hostess and a vicereine: ‘Though I am afraid you’ll laugh at our sham court that has a real one, but for my part I never was so little tired of a birthday in England, nor so well taken of and I own I like Queen Dorset much better than Queen Caroline.’¹²⁶

VI

By 1737, Ireland’s vicereines and its viceregal court were unrecognisable from the previous century. Dublin Castle was no longer just a residence, it was the political and social nexus of Ireland. Gone too were the days when the lord lieutenant’s wife was a shadowy figure, known only to a few and rarely seen in public beyond a few state occasions. Now she was one of Ireland’s premier hostesses, presiding over a glittering and bustling court, which, like her, had become an important and virtually indispensable part of the viceregal regime in Ireland. Though both changes were necessitated by political concerns, neither could have been achieved without the combined, if unequal, efforts of the vicereines. Much of the credit must go to Lady Carteret, whose dedication and talent outshone all who had gone before and whose efforts were imitated by many of her successors. Yet even her accomplishments owed something to her predecessors. Whether it was Mary, Duchess of Ormond, whose tenure saw a relaxation of the gender lines at the viceregal court, or the Duchess of Grafton, who showed

¹²⁶ IAA, MS A/9, Lady Anne Conolly to Lord Strafford, 31 Oct. 1733.

a willingness to set aside rank when it came to the ladies on her guest list, the contribution of these earlier ladies should not be forgotten.

Many others would follow the seven women discussed here, but all owed something to the advances made by the vicereines of the early eighteenth century. Faced with a fluctuating political situation, a shadow of a court and no clear role for themselves, they had succeeded in bringing a sense of royalty and prestige to Dublin Castle and in carving out a position for themselves at the apex of Irish society.